DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 688 CS 509 438

AUTHOR Swan, Susan Z.
TITLE Personal Orientations as a Bridge: Using the Myers-Briggs Typology To Understand the Major Paradigms of Communication Theory.
PUB DATE Nov 96
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (82nd, San Diego, CA, November 23-26, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Communication; Personality Traits; *Theories; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Myers Briggs Type Indicator; Theoretical Orientation

ABSTRACT

To combat the complaint that theory is abstract and without connection to real life, interpersonal communication instructors can use students' own theories about life--as represented through the dimensions of the Myers-Briggs Typology--as a starting point to understanding scholarly theory. Two of the Myers-Briggs Typology Indicator dimensions in particular, the Sensing-Intuiting dimension and the Thinking-Feeling dimension, when combined offer a striking insight into "traditional" and "alternative" worldviews in the field, and thus allow students an understanding of how disciplinary paradigms may reflect personal worldviews. Students enjoy this approach and see, to their surprise, that theorists are one of them--people with a preferred way of making sense of the world who use this to think about communication phenomena in particular ways. (Contains 18 references.) (Author/RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 404 688

Personal Orientations as a Bridge: Using the Myers-Briggs Typology to Understand the Major Paradigms of Communication Theory

Presented to the
Speech Communication Association Convention
November 1996
San Diego

Susan Z. Swan, Ph.D.
University of South Dakota

Abstract

To combat the complaint that theory is abstract and without connection to real life, one can use students' own theories about life--as represented through the dimensions of the Myers-Briggs Typology--as a starting point to understanding scholarly theory. Two of the MBTI dimensions in particular , the Sensing-Intuiting dimension and the Thinking-Feeling dimension, when combined offer a striking insight into Traditional and Alternative worldviews in the field, and thus allow students an understanding of how disciplinary paradigms may reflect personal worldviews. Students enjoy this approach and see, to their surprise, that theorists are one of them--people with a preferred way of making sense of the world who use this to think about communication phenomena in particular ways.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Swan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CS509435

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Personal Orientations as a Bridge:

Using the Myers-Briggs Typology to Understand

the Major Paradigms of Communication Theory

It is about the second week of a new term. You've been assigned to teach a capstone course in Communication Theory and find your students are struggling already--and you are only in the first few chapters of the textbook. "Who cares about this theory stuff anyway," they complain. "Why do I need to know anything about Epistemology?" they moan (much less Ontology and Axiology). "I majored in communication because I like working with people; what does this class have to do with anything!" they mutter (louder ... and louder ... and louder).

For a while, I figured my enthusiasm would win them over. I love theory, surely they could see its beauty and elegance, the intrigue of paradigm battles--if I could only push enough energy around in the room. And yes, I won a few over. The others were astonished that someone could get so excited about "this stuff" and generally wrote me off as a warm, fuzzy, demanding fruitcake--and they still didn't understand or value theory.

In the meantime, I had begun to talk about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) in my Interpersonal Communication course. I had recently taken a seminar on using the MBTI as a guide to teach writing more effectively and had also been on a faculty where we had used the MBTI for internal organizational development. I had begun to see its usefulness for interpersonal relationships and especially for dealing with issues of conflict, defensiveness

and supportiveness, and even socialized gender differences. The MBTI is a personality inventory grounded in the depth psychology of Carl Jung (1923) and systematized by Isabel Briggs Myers and Katharine Briggs. It assesses one's way of being in the world along four dimensions:

(1) sources of energy (Extroverts deri ve energy from outside, Introverts inwardly),

(2) ways of gathering data (Sensers prefer concrete realities, iNtuitives prefer imaginative possibilities),

(3) ways of making decisions (Thinkers prefer objective decision making while Feelers prefer more person-centered approaches), and

(4) orientation of self to outer world (Judgers prefer life planned and settled, Perceivers prefer spontaneity and adaptability)

While we enact both sets of behaviors for each dimension, Jung argued that we have a dominant preference which guides our ways of thinking and acting, and with which we are more comfortable. The combination of the preferences in each dimension determines an overall typology which can be used to predict values, beliefs, and actions of an individual (Hogan & Champagne, 1980, p. 89). The dimensions and the typology is typically determined using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (1987). Also available is the Hogan and Champagne inventory (1980), which is a "share-wear" measure of Jungian typology

The Hogan and Champagne inventory needs only about 20 minutes to take and score, is self scoring, requires no special licensing to administer, and (at least based on considerable anecdotal experience in my classes) is highly similar in results to the actual MBTI. It has thus become the instrument of choice in my classroom

On a intuition, I introduced the typology one term in Communication Theory when we were talking about trait research. From somewhere in the lively discussion that day came a question about how this might link to differences in Worldview I versus Worldview II ways of knowing. What a concept! And so I began to play around with the connections. What I began to see as a pattern was that two of the dimensions seemed closely associated with at least the "party -line" descriptions of Worldview I and Worldview II. These two dimensions, namely the SN (Sensing/iNtuitive) and the TF (Thinking/Feeling) dimensions, have been identified as those that deal most closely with cognitive processing styles (Carlson, 1989, p 486) as well as the two that form one's dominant and auxiliary functions (Krebs Hirsch, p. 4) Consider the adjectives used to describe these dimensions by Hogan and Champagne (1980)

Intuition--Sensing: (p. 96, exerpts)

Intuitive: prefers possibilities, theories, gestalts, the overall, invention, ... bored with nitty-gritty details, the concrete and the actual, and facts unrelated to concepts, ...thinks and discusses in spontaneous leaps of intuition ...

Sensing: prefers the concrete, factual, structured, tangible here-and-now, impatient with theory and the abstract, mistrusting intuition, thinks in careful, detail-by-detail accuracy, remembering facts, possibly missing conception of the overall

Feeling--Thinking (p.97, exerpts)

Feeler: makes judgements based on empathy, warmth, and personal values....more interested in people and feelings than impersonal logic, analysis, and things, and in conciliation and harmony; little interest being on top/impersonal goals

Thinker: makes judgements based on logic, analysis, evidence, avoids irrationality of feelings and values....more interested in logic, analysis, and verifiable conclusions; may step on others' feelings/needs, neglect values of others.

If one combines the two dimensions and looks in depth at the ST (Sensing/Thinking) type and the NF (iNtuitive/Feeling type), one gets, on the one hand, the ST who focuses on the concrete, factual, tangible here-and-now reality using logic, analysis, and evidence and, on the other, the NF, who focuses on the possibilities, patterns, and gestalts using leaps of intuition and making judgements based on empathy and personal values.

Compare this with Littlejohn's descriptions of a Worldview I approach "based on empiricist and rationalist ideas. It treats reality as distinct from the human being, something that people discover outside themselves. It assumes a physical, knowable reality that is self-evident to the trained observer. . . . Objectivity is all important. . . the scholar is highly analytical, attempting to define each part and subpart of the object of interest" (Littlejohn, 1966, p. 35). Littlejohn also highlights a similar description of "scientific scholarship" (p. 10) and the "Traditional paradigm," with its hypothetico-deductive method and variable-analytic tradition (p. 27). This sound surprising similar to what one would expect from an ST.

Descriptions of the Worldview II approach are decidedly different. Here one has an approach based on "constructivism, viewing the world in process....people take an active role in creating knowledge....Knowledge arises...from interaction between knower and known.... Worldview II attempts...to describe the rich context in which individuals operate. It is humanistic in that it stresses the individual subjective response. Knowing is interpreting." Littlejohn's description of "humanistic scholarship" (p. 11) and the "Alternative paradigm,"

using Penman's five tenets of theory (action is voluntary, knowledge is created socially, theories are historical, theories affect the 'reality' they are covering, and theories are value laded) also reflect a similar view (p. 29-30). These descriptions though are quite unlike an ST view and are highly consonant with an NF approach.

In pursuing the parallels even further, one may look at Epistemology as a dialectic between the Variable-analytic and the Interpretive, at Ontology as a dialectic between the Mechanical/Motion views and the Actional views, and at Axiology as a dialectic between the Amoral and the Moral, all of which are ST perspectives in tension with NF perspectives (Swan & Jose, 1995). This means that the philosophical foundations of theory, out of which paradigms are built, may indeed be a product of the personal psychological typologies of those who build the theories.

Further reflection (along with teaching a class in Cultural Diversity in the same term I was teaching Communication Theory) led me to realize that introducing the Myers-Briggs typology early on also allowed us to talk more profitably about cultural differences in theory building. For example, Littlejohn contrasts European approaches to communication, which reflect more "historical, cultural, and critical interests" (p. 4), with those in the United States, which reflect tendencies to study communication more "objectively with quantitative methods" (p. 4)--a mild NF to ST association. In addition, he contrasts Eastern perspectives with Western perspectives (p.5). The Eastern perspectives are characterized as grounded in a focus on wholeness, outcomes as unplanned and natural, the emotional and spiritual, the intuitive and experiential, and position-based relationships--all approaches which are NF in orientation. The Western perspectives are characterized as grounded in a focus on the parts

rather than whole, on individual control of outcomes, the verbal and rational, and self-controlled relationships--all approaches which are ST in orientation. Such ST and NF parallels also may be found, respectively, with high and low context cultures as well as individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

These contrasts are not especially surprising given that 75% of Americans are Sensing and 60% of American males are Thinking in orientation (Keirsey & Bates, 1978). One can also find parallels with gender in that the ST orientation is highly similar with traditional masculinity in Western society while the NF orientation is highly similar with traditional feminity in Western society.

Experiential Application of the Myers-Briggs to the Major Paradigms

Once I realized the strength of the parallels between the Myers-Briggs typology and a variety of the theoretical constructs in the field, I, with considerable input from students, began tinkering with ways to put this to use directly in introducing the grounding concepts of theory, philosophy, and paradigm. My current approach has 4 phases: we (1) begin with an administration of the Hogan and Champagne (1980) version of the typology inventory, (2) brainstorm related dialectics and synthesize them into a rough continuum from SensingThinking to iNtuitingFeeling, (3) discuss the concepts of theory, philosophy, and paradigm, and (4) then demonstrate, using a computerized graphical model, how the paradigms which parallel the typology continuum can be generated from the dialectics of Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology.

Phase 1: After becoming acquainted with one another, we begin the work of the term with an administration of the Hogan and Champagne (1980) inventory. This requires about 20 minutes for the students to take and score. Then we discuss what the scores mean, drawing on material from Hogan and Champagne (1980), Keirsey and Bates (1978), and the Report Form of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (1987).

Phase 2: We brainstorm a list of dialectics which seem typical in describing communication behaviors and communicative attitudes, using ideas from other courses which the students have had in the department, with some prompting and shaping from me. This generally gives us such parallels as communication theory and rhetoric, quantitative and qualitative, masculine and feminine, individualistic and collectivistic, low context and high context, instrumental and relational, rational and emotive, objective and subjective, intellectual and spiritual, public and private, scientific and critical, modern and postmodern, traditional and alternative, individual and group, realism versus constructionism, independent and interdependent, closed and open, defensive and supportive, report and rapport talk, and judgement and acceptance, along with the four dialectics of the Jungian psychology, extravert and introvert, sensing and intuitive, thinking and feeling, and judging and perceiving. [An added benefit of this exercise is that it sets groundwork to cover later the dialectical approaches found in critical and cultural studies as well as the relational dialectics of Altman (1993), Baxter (1988), Rawlins (1989, 1992), and Frey and Barge (1996).] Once we have brainstormed as many dialectics as possible, we then create a continuum from SensingThinking through iNtuitiveThinking and SensingFeeling to iNtuitiveFeeling. Next we

test each dialectic for polarity along the SensingThinking to iNtuitiveFeeling continuum. Typically for each of the dialectics listed above, the first element is linked with SensingThinking worldviews and the second element is linked with iNtuitiveFeeling worldviews.

Phase 3: Upon this base, which is primarily derived through an introverted experiential mode, we can then turn to more didactic approaches, discussing the readings on the nature of theory, philosophy, and paradigm. We read selections from Littlejohn (1996, chs. 1 and 2), Infante, Rancer, and Womack (1993, chs. 2 & 3), Peck (1978, pp. 185-197, 221-232), and Heath and Bryant (1992, ch 1). Then we discuss the concepts presented including defining theory, outlining various approaches to inquiry, and the underlying philosophical concepts of ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

Phase 4: Finally, as a way of visually and conceptually mapping the concepts using the continuum we have already derived using the Myers-Briggs typologies, we step through a computer presentation of philosophy and paradigm (Swan & Jose, 1995). This model presents three philosophical groundings as dialectical pairs:

Ontology is presented as a double dialectic of Motion and Action, and then within Action, we see a dialectic between Public and Private,

Epistemology is presented as a dialectic between Empirical/Variable-Analytic and Interpretive

Axiology is presented as a dialectic between Amoral (Values Neutral) and Moral (Values Driven)

Then we talk about the three major paradigms of the discipline. Unlike Littlejohn (1996), Infante, Rancer, and Womack (1993); Heath and Bryant (1992); and many others, the three are not given as laws, systems, and rules, but rather as laws, rules, and critical, under the presumption that systems approaches overlay laws and rules, with systems theory in human communication being primarily rules oriented. In addition, this allows the full integration of rhetorical theory to provide an inclusive coverage of the discipline. The order of presentation of the paradigms allows a further dialectic to be presented, that between laws (paradigm #1) and critical (paradigm #3) approaches, in order to show fairly clearly the SensingThinking and iNtuitingFeeling contrast. The rules/systems approach (paradigm #2) is presented as an oscillation out of the tension of laws and critical approaches--an oscillation which has unfortunately not resolved the tension because of its common replication of the stances of laws and critical theory within itself. A further oscillation, a unified theory (paradigm #4), is presented as a potential transformation of the dialectic into harmony [this paradigm has not, however, made its way into the computer program yet due to problems in adding a 3rd dimension to the drawing].

Finally, we revisit the links between philosophy and paradigm, demonstrating that the dialectics of philosophy underlie the stances of the three paradigms. For example, a laws orientation typically is characterized as motional or non-actional, grounded in the empirical, and as values neutral while the critical orientation is characterized as actional (beginning with the private, experiential construction of reality), grounded in interpretive methodologies, and as values driven. The social sciences are seen as a conflicted paradigm, bringing the controversies between the laws and critical theory dialectics fully into itself, while the unified

theory demonstrates the potential of harmonic resolution of the dialectics in a yin-yang fashion.

Conclusions

One might well ask whether this approach results in an elimination of the "so-what" questions which so plague a course in communication theory and with which I opened this essay. In my experience, it has at least significantly reduced these complaints (now they just complain loudly about the workload) and significantly increased the sophistication with which my students come to understand and discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the field. This approach and model become the touchstone for the entire course, with us continually returning to it to ask how to make sense of the various theories and approaches that we cover. Students are able, using this approach, to analyze research using various epistemologies, to interpret the work of a given theorist to derive grounding philosophies and paradigm, and to look at themselves as a potential theorist through a continual analysis of their individual orientations to the world as a tool to build theories about how to live life on a day-to-day basis. And thus, their understanding of their own personal psychodramatic orientations to the world becomes an effective bridge to an understanding of the major paradigms of communication studies.

References

Altman, I. (1993). Dialectics, physical environments, and personal relationships. Communication Monographs, 60, 26-34.

Baxter, L. (1988). A dialectical perspective on communication strategies in relationship development. In S. Duck (Ed.), Handbook of personal relationships (pp. 257-273). New York: Wiley.

Briggs, K. C., & Myers, I. B. (1987). Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Form G. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Carlson, J. G. (1989). Testing the test: Affirmative: In support of researching the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Journal of Counseling and Development, 67, 484-486.

Frey, L. R., & Barge, J. K. (1997). Managing group life: Communicating in decision-making groups. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Heath, R. L., & Bryant, J. (1992). Human communication theory and research: Concepts, contexts, & challenges. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hogan, R. C., & Champagne, D. W. (1980). Personal style inventory. In J. W. Pfeiffer & J. E. Jones (Eds.), The 1980 annual handbook for group facilitators (pp. 89-99). San Diego, CA: University Associates.

Infante, D. A., Rancer, A. S., & Womack, D. F. (1993). Building communication theory, 2nd ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

Keirsey, D., & Bates, M. (1978). Please understand me: Character & temperament types. Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis.

Krebs Hirsh, S. (1992.) MBTI team building program: Team member's guide. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Kroeger, O., & Thuesen, J. M. (1988). Type talk: The 16 personality types that determine how we live, love, and work (based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator). New York: Delta/Dell.

Jung, C. G. (1923). Personality types. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Littlejohn, S. W. (1996.) Theories of human communication, 5th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator: (Form G--self-scorable) report form. (1987). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Peck, M. S. (1978). The road less traveled: A new psychology of love, traditional values and spiritual growth. New York: Touchstone/Simon and Schuster.

Rawlins, W. K. (1989). A dialectical analysis of the tensions, functions, and strategies challenges of communication in young adult friendships. In J. A. Anderson (Ed.), Communication Yearbook 12 (pp. 157-189). Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989.

Rawlins, W. K. (1992). Friendship matters: Communication, dialectics, and the life course (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter).

Swan, S. Z., & Jose, N. (1995, Nov.) Teaching the college course in Communication Theory with interactive multi-media computer modeling. Shortcourse presented at the Speech Communication Association conference, San Antonio.